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A
SERMON

DELIVERED IN

ST. GEORGE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH,
SOUTHWARK,

ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUG. 11TH., 1850.

BY

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BISHOP OF MELIPOTAMUS, V. A. L.

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NOTICE.

The following Sermon was preached so recently before the departure of the author for Rome, that he was wholly unable to peruse the short-hand writer's notes, or to superintend the printing and publishing of it. He has, however, determined not to delay the publication, though at the risk of errors of the press, as well as in the substance of the Discourse.

MORNING SERMON.

"BUT HE, WILLING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF, SAID TO JESUS,—AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?"—Luke x. 29.

THESE words are from the 10th Chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, read in the Office of this Sunday. The answer to this question, my Brethren, appears to us now so natural and so simple, that we feel almost indignant at him who could thus interrogate the Son of God ; and yet, when that question was put, there was but one upon earth who was capable of answering it. Had it been placed before the greatest of heathen sages, connected with the precept which has been just recited from the Old Law, he would have known no meaning that he could apply to the word concerning which information is asked, beyond its crude and literal meaning, which would not seem, even to him, to establish the commonest claim to affection. "Who is my neighbour?" he would ask. It may be, perhaps, he who lives in my immediate vicinity. It may mean one with whom I am in some way connected by ties of citizenship ; but beyond some such narrow limit as this he could have no idea of what was meant by "neighbour," in a christian sense, who was to be loved as we love ourselves. Or, if the question had been put to the interrogator himself, to a man learned in the Jewish law, "Who is

your neighbour” whom you are thus to love? he would have at once recurred to the mysterious lesson of his Law, that “Thou shalt love thy friend, and thou shalt hate thine enemy,” and he would have drawn a line between those two classes of men, as caprice, or passion, or human interest might have dictated; though but a small sphere would have enclosed the one, while the great bulk of mankind would have been spread over a vast and unbounded extent, which is beyond that limit.

Then it was no chance, it was a providence that this question should have been put to Him, who alone could answer it, and who has made that answer so familiar, that now the least of christian children would know how familiarly to reply to it. Well may we thank him who was in some mode raised up to ask that question, that so we might have an answer; not merely because it brought forth from the rich treasures of our Saviour’s wisdom that most beautiful, that most tender, that most divine of all his parables,—that of the good Samaritan, but because it led him to lay down that christian principle of charity which has become the very heart of christian society,—which has been the first great principle of all christian policy, and all christian civilization, and all christian enterprise,—thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. And “who is my neighbour?” With what deep wisdom did our blessed Redeemer answer this question, when he pointed out to the Jew, the Samaritan, in the character of whom was to be found all that was requisite to reply to this demand; for while he so powerfully and so touchingly reprovèd the enquirer, by giving the example of charity he desired in the Samaritan, he taught the Jew that as the Samaritan

had included one of his race among *his* neighbours, so he likewise must learn to expand his heart, and to embrace all mankind in that new love, which was to be the great lesson, the great inheritance of the Christian race. For, my Brethren, the Samaritan was not an enemy of the Jew; he was worse than this,—he was his rival. He was looked upon with that peculiar feeling of low hatred which is a compound of contempt and of jealousy. The Jew might have been generous, and almost loving, towards the inhabitants of distant regions, whom he scarcely knew, who never came across his own path. He might, and did, no doubt, hate the Roman, who had usurped over him, and over the whole world, that dominion which the Jew claimed for himself and his race; but there was fear and awe mingled in that sentiment; and he felt, too, that under that mighty dominion of Rome he enjoyed security, and peace, and prosperity. But the Samaritan was one who had crept into the very heart of that land which should have been appropriated to him as his own inheritance. He had usurped a worship which the Jew considered as exclusively his own; he was the only one who presumed to offer sacrifices to God in a Holy place, and to despise the ordinances of Jerusalem; but at the same time, observed, even more strictly than the Jew, the spirit of the Law. He was enterprising, and he was charitable, and he was kind, and known for his social virtues, and formed a reproach to those in the midst of whom he lived, and with whom he received that spiritual equality which the Jew considered exclusively his own.

Then when our Blessed Saviour thus told the Jew that the Samaritan was to be included in the number

of those whom he was to call his neighbours, he at once threw open the bounds of human love, and made it embrace whatever there might be among men which made them objects of antipathy to us, and made us most naturally shrink from loving them.

Such, then, my Brethren, is the great principle which our Blessed Saviour laid down and gave to His Church, and which has been the rule of her conduct from the beginning. And you will allow me, therefore, this morning to trace for you this principle in the action of the Church, to show you the influence which those words have exercised over the whole of the world, over society, and over all that has sprung from it in the whole of the world, wherever the Christian name has been known or heard. Whatever our Blessed Saviour undertook upon earth, whatever he did for man, whatever he bestowed upon him, he wished to imprint with two characteristics,—which to human ingenuity and human power would have seemed inconsistent one with the other. All was intended by him to be, at the same time, universal and yet one. He redeemed the whole of mankind. There was no exception to that great work which formed the object of his existence upon earth; but all men, of whatever race, of whatever country, and of whatever age, were to be redeemed by one single action, at the same instant. There were to be universality and unity in that act; and faith, which springs from this great mystery, and which seemed as intended to act upon that portion of man's constitution, which proverbially is supposed to be the most various in its action,—his mind; that faith which, therefore, it might have seemed impossible to impress with these peculiar characters, was in like manner

intended to be universal, and yet one ; one faith, one doctrine, was declared to all nations,—to all the world ; and it was the wise and holy intention of Divine Providence that all mankind should believe the same faith, should possess the same faith,—the learned and the unlearned, the civilized and the savage. Whatever might be the variety of their ideas, and their thoughts, and their wishes, upon every other subject that interested them, they were intended to be placed at the same level in regard to that supernatural revelation which is communicated through His incarnate Word. All, whoever they might be, wherever they might be called into existence, were to believe the same ; a oneness of Faith was to be as sure a characteristic of His teaching as universality. And so likewise with regard to His Church ; He meant that society of the faithful united to Him to be as completely one, as are the members of the same body a part of the same being,—as are the scattered portions of the same kingdom subject to the same rule. And that kingdom of the Messiah, which was to extend to the bounds of the earth, was to be under one kingship, one headship, one rule, and one law.

Then in like manner with regard to charity ; our Blessed Saviour, having given this as a great gift, as a new virtue, and unknown to the generations that had gone before His time, stamped it likewise with the same impress of His own power, and made the precept as to loving mankind universal, so as to embrace the whole of mankind, yet at the same time to be performed by one single act, centred completely in each individual ; so that the whole of mankind should be thus as firmly knitted in complete and

entire love as the various elements which compose one man are united in self-love within his heart; for all our neighbours must be loved even as we love ourselves.

Then how was this to be accomplished? For it would appear as if love of God's nature were diffusive rather than concentrated, as if we had in loving others, to love those who, as it were, went forth from ourselves, instead of gathering them unto us. Love, which had not been known upon earth as a virtue, but merely as an instinct, or a passion, was of earthly growth. Each plant gathered around itself the kindly influence of that which was immediately in its neighbourhood, and they might entwine their branches together, in close friendship, they might bask in the same sunshine, or enjoy the same congenial soil, and thus have a sympathy, as it were, a growth and an expansion; but rooted to the spot, fixed on that soil, how were they to partake of whatever was beyond their sphere, their reach, or their consciousness? This was the great problem to be solved,—to give to charity or fraternal love the same characteristic which belonged to every other great gift of the new Law—and thus it was done.

The concentration of love is naturally from earth to heaven, in the same manner as men, in whatever part of the world they are, naturally turn their eyes towards one and the same sun, and admire and glorify it; and as in return from that sun are shed forth over every part of the earth rays which come from itself with diffusive power, and thus may be said to form an intermediate means of communication between things which are most distant upon earth,—so God gives first the precept to love Him, to love Him

with an intensity of love, to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our power; and all men thus loving God—(O ! that they did so ! but such is the design and the wish of His blessed love)—all men loving Him, who alone is the great, the one object of universal love, towards whom all, from every corner of the earth, may turn, and in whom they will find enough to love and to adore; all the affections of mankind being thus drawn towards Him and centered in Him; and He, manifesting to all that love Him that He is universal love, and loves all that He has made, and man, that He has redeemed above all; then from Him descend over the whole earth those rays of fraternal charity which make us perform that great mysterious act of love, unknown to men before the magnificent revelation of Christianity, but which is one of its most wonderful privileges, the loving all other beings—all other things in God, and for His sake; reading, as it were, in Him that love which He has for all mankind; and thus endeavouring to make a likeness to Him—the natural result and fruit of love seeking and striving to the utmost to love all as He loves them. And surely it is not too much, then, to ask that we should love them as we love ourselves, for He has loved them as He loved Himself, and more, for He has given Himself, and stripped Himself of His glory, robbed Himself of His majesty, abased Himself, and, as it were, declared Himself for man, and has even submitted to ignominy, and died to redeem him. Then, instead of having to strive for what is beyond the power of man, to feel the distinct and tender love for what we have neither seen nor known,—this love of God inspires us to love all other things, because it is through God that we

love them,—our affections first rise to Him,—there all is concentrated, and thence all is dispersed.

Now what must necessarily be the working of a principle like this? the intense love, that is, of God, and, as a consequence, as intense a love of our neighbours? Why, that throughout the Church, in every age, in every place, all distinctions between men have vanished before the Church, because before God they are equal; and whatever of distinction or division there was of old has been broken down, and active charity has sought to pursue its objects everywhere, without reference to any natural, social, or domestic tie.

Look at that venerable man, who bears upon his countenance the clear marks of high and noble birth and refined education: nay, in whose solemn and austere, but at the same time benignant countenance, you may suppose that you behold the venerable features of some sacred Pontiff. See him bending over the rough labour to which his hands have not been accustomed, breaking with feeble and aged hands the soil that is committed to his cultivation. Who is that? It is the venerable Paulinus, one of the noblest of Rome's sons, one of the most learned of her Bishops, a man respected and revered by the whole of Italy and Africa. And wherefore do we see him thus changed from his natural condition? Because he has given himself as a slave to the conqueror,—to the devastator of his diocese, concealing his dignity that he may purchase the freedom of his flock, that he may ransom them from slavery.

See in later times the meek and cheerful St. Peter Nolasco, even giving himself up to bonds, that he may free the slave; the slave who at the time when the

question was asked, "Who is my neighbour?" would not have been accepted by the wisest and best of men, as an object of kindness or of love. And wherefore? Because he has, in his love of his God and in his love of his Redeemer, truly read the lesson, that He became as man, and that He humbled Himself, and suffered in order that He might rescue man, the captive of Satan and of sin; and thinks that he cannot better copy Him than by imitating, in regard to man, that very example of charity.

And who is that? A poor, and, outwardly, a mean-looking person, who has not in his countenance a trait of great or noble achievements, who, a short time before, had been followed by crowds of children mocking him in the streets—who had been treated by the wise of this world as no better than insane, and had been chained up among those who were suffering from mental malady. And now see that magnificent hospital which has been raised in the Royal City. A fire has broken out there—it is full of patients, without power to move themselves. Every one shrinks from lending them assistance, and he, who unaided, and despised, has contrived—God only knows how—to erect this first magnificent building, that was founded to receive the sick, is to be seen there, running to and fro, fearless of the flames, and carrying one after the other to a place of safety, so that not the hair of the head of one is scorched. This is the ignoble John of God, as he was before man, but now glorified in the Church, and who, because he was an instrument of Divine Providence, to manifest, and to bring to that magnificence to which its development has arrived at, charity, which regards the sick, and the feeble, and the decrepid. And how has he learned this, that poor

and bookless man? By loving God above all things—by loving man with an intensity of that love, which takes in the whole heart, and soul, and strength of man, and learning that the love of his God is to be again diffused in the form of charity—upon whom? Upon those that first love us? Upon those whose great qualities, whose virtues, and whose amiable gifts, render them worthy of our love? No: upon the Samaritan or the Jew, upon whoever is in distress, upon every one who needs our help—that great and universal charity, without any distinction of colour or of race.

Again, behold another simple-hearted, kind-featured old man, who is seated at the council board of his king, suggesting the wisest and the best measures for the government of a vast kingdom, at its very height of prosperity—a statesman and a general. Royalty itself listens with respect and veneration to every word he speaks. If you had gone forth early in the morning, you would have found him creeping through the silent city, covered with snow, and listening if he could hear the wail of a little one, abandoned by its unnatural parent, and you would have seen him take it into his arms, and carry it home with him, as though he had found a prize of matchless value; and, if you will follow him in the evening, you will find him, not seated at the banquet table of his sovereign, at whose councils he has attended, but you will find him sitting on the same bench with the galley slave chained to the oar, and you will find him whispering to him words of consolation, and bidding him be of good cheer, and reminding him of his Saviour, a prisoner for his sake, and encouraging him to love God, and to love those who were the cause of his misfortunes.

And what is this virtue which made the venerable St.

Vincent de Paul that which he is in the love and estimation of the whole world? It is a knowledge of who was his neighbour; it is that charity which, learned again from the love of God, made him feel that there was no exception to the law of its action,—which embraced equally the object of human justice, and the innocent victim of human injustice, and which, (though it may appear a fable, is nevertheless a truth), extended itself from the infant, and from the culprit, even to the king, and made the saint not shrink from giving up his time to what it may be supposed a devout ascetic like him, might have thought but a waste of what he had devoted to holier pursuits. This is the charity of the church; and see what must have been the effect of a feeling like this, which, from the beginning of the church, has been in its very heart; what must have been its influence upon society, and upon all those measures which have brought nations into their present condition? Can we imagine, my brethren, the state of ancient Rome, for instance, the city of palaces, the city of magnificence and grandeur on every side, where the wealth of the whole earth poured in, and was lavishly spent and displayed, where there were no limits to the enjoyment of luxury, and where, consequently—for this is a necessary consequence—crowds, multitudes of poor, must have flocked, armies of dependants must have worn out their lives; and yet, not a single charitable institution, not an hospital, not a word in the language for alms-deeds; not, in fact, the word charity, which is so familiar to our hearts, and which has no corresponding term in the rich vocabulary of ancient Rome? What became of those poor men and women, when they at last reached the years of infirmity, and when the failing vision,

and the fainting step, enabled them no longer to earn their bread? What became of that host of slaves, who had been pampered in luxury by their masters, so long as they were useful; but who were flung away when they could no longer minister to their pleasures and desires? What became of that mass of proletarianism, which must have festered in ancient Rome? where not a hand was stretched out to relieve or assist, and where the claims of different castes were unknown? Oh! it is fearful to think in what frightful ways they made their ends:—how many snatched themselves, by their own acts, from a life of misery;—how many vanished under the compassionate assassination of their own friends;—and how many, when pestilence, or any infliction, visited that city, died in masses, and were put aside, and forgotten? Can we imagine a stronger contrast between the modern times and the ancient than this, that there should be a feeling in society which makes it acknowledge the claims of poverty, of sickness and distress, upon those who are themselves exempt from those evils? Sweep away at once all our institutions, and all our ideas and principles relating to this important matter, and we should soon see the whole of our social fabric crumble, and sink as rapidly as did that vast empire. But this shows how the principle laid down by our blessed Redeemer, had its action within that sphere that came within reach of each one's sensibilities, breaking down in every instance those distinctions which the answer of our blessed Redeemer was intended to remove; but it would be a small portion of that charity which Christ bequeathed to His church. Turn your eyes, then, once more towards that city to which I have just now alluded, and there, upon the brow of one of her ven-

erable hills, you see standing yet the edifice to which I wish to direct your attention. You see issuing forth from its portals a procession of holy men, clad in the monastic habit, bearing in their countenances deep marks of the painful thought which their present work has excited in them. They are men who have left the world, because they feared it, who had scarcely for years ventured beyond the threshold of that religious house which had been their home. They knew nothing of foreign travel, or of foreign tongues, in the days when scarcely the more powerful, the more rich, ventured far beyond the limits of Roman civilisation. And whither are those men going? and for what cause? They are going to an island in the northern seas, in which it has been announced, that there is a new race, a new people who had taken possession of the land, and who are still immersed in the darkness of heathenism. And what has excited this extraordinary desire to go and visit this distant land? Some poor captives from that race have been bought in the slave market of Rome, and the sight of them has excited the pity and the tender sympathies of the great and holy Gregory; and he has commanded his choicest disciples, his dearest children, to tear themselves from that city, from their homes, round which were circled all their affections, and beyond which they knew nothing, to seek, they knew not how, that distant land, and endeavour to convert its inhabitants to Christianity. And what again is this, but that same charity which was not encountered by acquaintance, by knowledge, by familiarity, but was felt in regard to utter strangers, with whom there was no connection? And why? Because God has loved, and did love the souls that were His, perishing; and because the Son of God had died for their sakes,

as well as for those of Rome. They felt that this principle of charity, which broke down all social, and even natural distinctions between the families of men, urged them forward, not prompting them merely, but compelling them as a duty to undertake this great and noble task. And this is the history of apostleship from the beginning till now. The boldest things which men have done, the greatest discoveries which have been undertaken, have had this great principle of charity as their root, have emanated from it, and have only been one mode of manifesting it.

Then I ask, my brethren, why is this? Wherefore this desire, this yearning, this longing wish to bring others, who are estranged from what the Church teaches, to a participation of its doctrines, and its holy institutions. O! my brethren, to understand this fully, it would be necessary to enter more deeply than time will permit, into a consideration of another and a most solemn truth; but I will briefly unfold it, for it will be a key to the minds, perhaps, of many, of what too often is misunderstood, and misrepresented.

The Catholic then believes that whatever gifts God has bestowed upon man, whatever blessings of a temporal character, whatever advantages of a more accidental nature, whatever gifts of a spiritual or intellectual character He may have given to individuals, to nations or to the whole world, they are all as nothing compared with the gift of Faith, the true, the saving faith. And hence the Catholic feels that if the greatest of charities consists in bestowing upon man that which is the most precious and valuable gift that can be given him, that then the charity which knows no bounds, the charity of the good Samaritan, the charity of Jesus Christ, our Lord,

can in no way be manifested and practised so truly as this, in taking to those who know it not, the word of truth, in communicating to nations in darkness the true Faith, or in bringing those who are by circumstances estranged from it, into its full and complete participation. And hence, however great that charity may be, which, breaking down all social distinctions, ministers to the poor, to the sick, to the captive, to the slave, these are all as nothing in the sight of a Catholic heart or before the Church of God,—they are nothing in comparison to this charity which immediately directs all its thoughts and energies to the soul that is to be saved, and does in regard to the spiritual and immortal part of man, in which is really stamped God's image, that which those other, lesser, external, visible acts of charity perform in regard to the body that will perish.

Then it is not wonderful that the Church at all periods should have considered this as a great exercise of its charity; and I will go a step further, and ask is it wonderful then that the Church of God, with a principle like this, should at all times have been either fiercely attacked, or jealously viewed, for what is called its proselytising spirit, its desire, its earnest wish, its zealous efforts to gather all, if possible, unto a unity of faith?

O! my Brethren, if there be any doctrine upon earth that has been more sadly misunderstood and misrepresented as to Catholic teaching, it is this, that salvation belongs to only one system of teaching, or to only one Church. I mean represented, for so it constantly is, as a narrow and uncharitable view. O! my Brethren, that doctrine is the very main spring of the most magnificent charity of the whole earth. No apostle would have gone forth to teach nations, and

have faced prisons, racks, and death, if he had not believed in his soul that it was necessary that men should believe as he did, that they might be saved. For what motive less than this, could induce one to trample upon all that human nature takes delight in, and this for the sake of others? Can any one for a moment imagine that we, or any others who act upon this Catholic principle, being ready even to die if necessary, that all might be like ourselves except our bonds? Is it credible, that we would do all this for a foolish, vain, stupid, and unsatisfactory motive, which some think sufficient to account for it, a desire to domineer over the minds of men, or bring them into a captivity similar to our own? Whatever has been done in the Church, from the time of the Apostles until now, in regard to the conversion of nations, one and all have had their conversion undertaken and accomplished solely as the result of this great conviction, that the true Faith was the greatest of God's blessings upon man—that that faith it was of the utmost importance, and even necessity, that all, if possible, should have brought to them, and all who once had learned it should embrace it, and all who had embraced it should keep it. This, and this alone, has animated the Church, and this, and this alone, has led to the accomplishment of the last great development of this teaching of our Blessed Redeemer, that the neighbour whom we are to love, whom we are to love not merely with a bare, speculative inward love, but whom we are to love with active, with zealous, and generous love, is a stranger and a foreigner, and one even on the shores of the most distant islands of the ocean, but how much more the neighbours, in every sense of the word, who though at our side in the body—who though living in the midst of us, and we

in the midst of them, as one people—yet look upon us as aliens in creed, in that which should form the strongest bond of union, and consider us as not belonging to themselves, as almost out of caste, because we hold those doctrines which we consider more precious than our very lives. And truly, my Brethren, this will be reason enough, not merely now, but for ever, for the Church in this country to continue her untiring efforts, not satisfied, whatever may oppose her course, till she sees, if God reserves such a blessing for us, the whole of this country bound together in one tie of charity and true faith. For see you not, that love men as we may, there is no bond so straight, so tight, and at the same time so tender, as that bond of charity which is intertwined likewise with community of faith, which unites not only hearts, but intellects also, in a common belief; which makes them partakers of the same spiritual consolations, breathes of the same divine life that is in the Church, closely knitted together, as parts of the same plant, or of the same body, and united to the same root, our Lord Jesus Christ? For this is the triumph of that charity which our Saviour inculcated, that it rests not until it establishes likewise this additional, and this most important bond, and brings her into perfect unity by that which alone can constitute it perfectly, a unity of faith and religion. And this shows that the charity which our Blessed Redeemer inculcated in those words, was a charity truly catholic in every sense of the term, a charity universal, that excludes none, a charity which binds them together by every indissoluble tie. And, my Brethren, I own that if I were called on to express the blessing which of all others I would wish to this our country, it would not be greater political influ-

ence, and dominion over the world, it would not be an increase of its already exuberant wealth, it would not be the advancement of science and of literature, already so vastly developed, it would not be a still greater display and expansion of its innate forces which astonish the world, in the creation of works requiring almost unbounded enterprise united with unlimited wealth. No,—it would be none of these. I speak it boldly and without disguise, it would be that the Catholic faith should be the religion of this land; because I see so many elements of human greatness, wanting only the spiritual life added to them, which investing them with the divine principle, would make them magnificent works, not only for this our earth, but magnificent also for the records of another and a better world. If commensurate with this there were also a display of that intense and truly sincere energy that is shown in regard to other things, in respect to religion; and if men's minds were as active about the other world as they are about this earth, and, turning themselves to the proof and explanation of spiritual things, were to be brought, as of consequence they must infallibly be, to unity of thought in regard to these most important truths; then, indeed, we should see an example of what the world never before has contemplated, an example of what would appear almost to be so great and so divine a work, that there would be nothing left for earth afterwards to do; a combination of all that is magnificent, and glorious, and noble upon earth, with all that is sacred, and all that is honored, and all that is divine in heaven.

